



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Watersheds in Berkshire and Essex counties included in expansion of the national Conservation Security Program**

**GREAT BARRINGTON, MASS.** — Two Massachusetts watersheds – one in Berkshire County and one in Essex County – are among 202 across the nation selected for the Conservation Security Program (CSP), a new federal program designed to reward farmers for long-term land stewardship.

Richard Coombe, Regional Assistant Chief for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), announced the Massachusetts launch of the program today at Windy Hill Farm in Great Barrington. Coombe was joined by federal, state and local officials, as well as farm owners Dennis and Judy Mareb, for the announcement.

CSP, which is administered by NRCS, is a stewardship program that recognizes the efforts of farmers who have been practicing conservation and taking care of the land for some time. Meeting specific eligibility criteria allows farmers to apply for payments on productive land at several levels. Payments increase with the amount of conservation work that has been done.

"The purpose of CSP is to reward the best and motivate the rest," said Coombe. "These payments for demonstrable long-term stewardship will reward many of those who undertook conservation on their own initiative and who care for the resources we all share."

CSP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. This fall marks the first opportunity for farmers from each state to participate, about one eighth of the nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period. Sign-up for the 2005 Conservation Security Program will begin this winter.

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Farms located in the selected Massachusetts watersheds will be eligible to apply for CSP. The program will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows.

“As an agency and as a nation we have helped farmers fix conservation problems such as soil erosion or water conservation since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s,” said Cecil B. Currin, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. “CSP, however, represents a whole new direction in conservation and agricultural policy and programs,” said Currin.

Participants will be enrolled in one of three tiers in the program, depending on the extent of the conservation treatment in place on the farm. Payments will be based in part on this existing conservation treatment as well as the landowner’s willingness to undertake additional environmental enhancements.

Currin said that while protecting soil and water quality are the “price of admission,” farmers will also have options to improve wildlife habitat, undertake on-farm energy conservation, improve air quality, participate in environmental monitoring, participate in watershed-wide stewardship programs, improve nutrient and pest management activities.

NRCS, as well as the Berkshire and Essex conservation districts, will offer individual and group outreach to explain the program to interested potential participants. For more information on CSP and other NRCS programs in Massachusetts, visit [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).